

# News from Ed Markey

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## REP. MARKEY CALLS FOR INVESTIGATION OF POST-KATRINA TOXIC CHEMICAL SOUP

*Lawmaker raises concerns, calls for immediate action to address the threat of chemicals released by Katrina*

**Washington, D.C.** – Representative Edward J. Markey (D-MA), a senior Democrat on the Homeland Security Committee sent a letter today to Michael Chertoff the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Stephen L. Johnson, Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) raising concerns about the health and security risks posed by the destruction of chemical facilities in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama.

“The city of New Orleans is sitting beneath a potentially deadly toxic chemical soup. We already know that Louisiana has more than forty seven facilities that could cause deadly chemical explosions – we need to act immediately to make sure that this natural disaster is not followed by a man-made chemical catastrophe,” said Rep. Markey, the author of legislation to reduce the risks presented by chemical and hazardous materials shipped and housed in communities around the country and require that chemical companies switch to safer chemicals and processes when possible.

According to a recent Congressional Research Service report requested by Rep. Markey there are 47-50 facilities in Louisiana at which a worst-case scenario could put 100,000-999,999 people at risk, as well as 2 facilities where a worse case release could impact more than 1 million people. In Florida, there exist 21-22 facilities at which a worst-case release could put 100,000-999,999 people at risk and 7 facilities that could impact more than 1 million people, and in Mississippi, there are 2 facilities at which a worst-case release could put 100,000-999,999 people at risk.

The letters sent today request that post hurricane assessments include extensive investigation into the environmental impacts of the release of toxic chemicals into the water:

“As the damage assessment and remediation associated with Hurricane Katrina proceeds, I believe it is important not just to evaluate the degree to which releases and environmental contamination may have occurred, but also to take steps to ensure that the contamination that might have been preventable had the chemical facility used a less toxic chemical or process will not recur in the future,” the letters state.

Reports of contamination resulting from leaky chemical and oil and gas facilities in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina are widespread, particularly in Louisiana. A second set of concerns has been raised over the potency of reactions that could take place when some chemicals hit water. A January 2001 Journal of Loss Prevention in the Process Industries article concluded that the cause of the chemical accident which caused the hospitalization of almost 900 people in Bogalusa, Louisiana in 1995 was caused by the entry of water into a storage vessel.

Voicing concerns about the horrific effects of the hurricane, Rep. Markey’s letter requests that detailed information on leaks or damages sustained during Katrina be reported along with any cost estimates for clean-up. The letter also requests reports on the consequences of reactions when chemicals come into contact with water. Rep. Markey’s letter calls for EPA and DHS to report information on any forms of federal assistance are available to facilities containing stores of toxic materials that sustained damages due to Hurricane Katrina. Rep. Markey is working to ensure that any federal grants or other funding established to address the chemical spills work to improve the security of new chemical facilities and encourage a switch to less toxic chemicals where alternatives are available.

“We need to act immediately to address the imminent threat presented by the rampant chemical leaks and spills in Louisiana. The damage caused by Katrina’s winds and water is just the tip of the iceberg compared to the potential disaster that could be created by the release of deadly chemicals into the flood waters,” said Rep. Markey.

For more information on Representative Markey's work on chemical security check out:  
<http://www.house.gov/markey/>